

THE RISING POWERS AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE RISING POWERS AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

by

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ABSTRACT

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The emergence of China and India as regional and international powers has implications for the relevancy of extant collective security mechanisms in SE Asia. Their growth will continue to contribute significantly to the dynamism of the region and has the potential to both define new points of potential conflict and influence how regional and international disputes are resolved. The growing importance of the global commons to trade in the area is one of many potential points of friction that will need to be dealt with under any new security agreements. The methods used to create enduring collective security mechanisms has significance beyond SE Asia and may have validity for other regions or the globe.

THE RISING POWERS AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

Asia has proved that she can do the economics. Can she also do the politics that come with power?¹

-Shivshankar Menon,
India's National Security Adviser

Changing geopolitical and economic circumstances, new technologies, shifting attitudes within states and societies as well as adjustments to America's strategic priorities and capabilities are forcing significant accommodations to be made to the broader structure of the international order.² This is particularly so in South and East Asia and there is a growing expectation that the United States, China and India will contest each other's strategic influence within the region.

While there is common agreement on the difficulties that the rise of China presents to U.S. influence in East Asia and acknowledgement of the growing importance of India to the security of the Indian Ocean, there is less certainty on which is more important.³ Strategists suggest that the U.S. shift its focus from Europe and the Atlantic in order to buffer the rise of China and India across the West Pacific, the Indian Ocean and the archipelagic regions of South East Asia – a huge task for any nation, even with the support of strong and willing partners. It is almost certain that the task is beyond the capacity of any one nation and will require a collective response. It is unlikely that traditional, coercive strategies or conventional military power will provide a sustainable or successful method for achieving long term stability, the continuation of trade, or guarantee the access to resources that is of such critical interest to the region and its global partners.

This paper will examine the impact that the rise of China and India will have on collective security in South East Asia. It will identify points of friction and alignment and outline potential modalities for realizing greater unity of effort from within the region for the purpose of achieving long-term stability across South East Asia.

The Importance of South East Asia to China and India

China and India have acquired the technological, administrative and communication means characteristic of rising powerful states and have coupled this with potentially formidable military capability.⁴ Their quest for energy security has compelled them “to redirect their gazes from the land to the seas.”⁵ It is expected that by 2050, both nations will between them account for about three billion people, a third of the currently expected nine billion people the world will by then need to sustain. It is also expected that the world’s energy needs will rise by 50 percent by 2030, and almost half of that added demand will come from India and China.⁶

Their interest in the commons of South and East Asia is therefore understandable. Dependable access to the commons is the backbone of the international economy and political order, benefiting the global community in ways that few appreciate or realize.⁷ Robert Gates recognized the critical role that the commons play in a speech in 2008 to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, calling for a “stand for openness, and against exclusivity, and in favor of common use of common spaces in responsible ways that sustain and drive forward our mutual prosperity.”⁸ As the 2010 U.S. Department of Defense’s *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* states, “Global security and prosperity are contingent on the free flow of goods shipped by air or sea, as well as information transmitted under the ocean or through space.”⁹ Access

to the global commons enables these flows, in turn promoting both international stability and prosperity.

The commons of South and East Asia play a significant role in this equation. The Indian Ocean already accounts for one half of the entire world's container traffic, and the Indian Ocean rim-land from the Middle East to the Pacific accounts for 70 percent of the traffic of petroleum products for the entire world.¹⁰ More than 85 percent of oil bound for China will traverse the Indian Ocean and pass through the Strait of Malacca. The combined appetite of China, Japan and South Korea for Persian Gulf oil already makes the Straits of Malacca home to half of the world's oil flows and close to a quarter of global trade.¹¹ Of the fourteen nations constituting East and South East Asia, twelve are highly dependent on Middle Eastern oil, and almost all comes through this narrow strait.¹² Dominated by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, the Straits have been described by Robert Kaplan as, "the Fulda Gap of the twenty first century multi-polar world, the place where almost all of the shipping lanes between the Red Sea and the Sea of Japan converge at the most vital choke point of world commerce; where the spheres of naval influence of India and China meet; where the Indian Ocean joins the western Pacific."¹³

The absence of ideologically based political friction and strategic jockeying between the great powers following the end of the Cold War has allowed Asia to integrate and grow economically.¹⁴ Many of the ASEAN nations have undergone massive economic growth and development over the past few decades, however most ASEAN economies are small and underdeveloped, and many citizens remain desperately poor.¹⁵ Despite their political alliance, the ASEAN nations are far from

economically homogenous: per-capita GDPs range from just \$ 462 in Myanmar's poorly developed economy, crippled by political strife and characterized mainly by subsistence agriculture, to \$38,972 in Singapore—the highly developed high-tech and financial hub of Southeast Asia.¹⁶ Even with continued economic growth and integration, the ASEAN nations will face serious political and social problems in the next few decades.

China is growing increasingly important to the growth of this region and the relative influence of the U.S., Europe or India will continue to diminish on the basis of economic interests alone. Despite the dramatic impact of the global financial crisis the region continues to “cut its umbilical cord of economic dependence on the USA and Europe” and is generating growth increasingly independent of the global economy.¹⁷ Even though export trade will remain vital to future prosperity, falls in American and European demand for products will increasingly be met by consumption from within the region. While ASEAN and Chinese trade is increasing overall, an ever larger share of this trade is within the South China Sea Region—intra-ASEAN trade increased by more than 550% from 1993 to 2008, and ASEAN-China trade has increased more than 21-fold.¹⁸ Trade with the EU, while growing in volume, has remained more or less constant in percentage terms and now makes up 12% of ASEAN trade. Trade with China already rivals the U.S. and will continue to increase, accelerating past the EU and ASEAN's previous main trading partner, Japan.¹⁹ India's share has also grown, albeit from virtually a zero base, but it remains behind that of Australia and New Zealand combined, and behind South Korea.²⁰

The growing interdependence of such a strategically important region means that the western world will find itself dealing increasingly with contested regional agendas

based primarily on basic issues such as access to trade and guaranteed access to the resources needed to ensure economic development.²¹ The politics of the region is proving adept at handling financial interests where issues of territorial integrity and sovereignty are not contested, however, there is little collective political appetite to deal with situations where financial interests, territorial integrity and issues impacting on sovereignty combine, such as the contested territorial claims in the South China Sea. Although forceful influence or intervention is unwelcome there is a clear recognition that some form of higher economic and security regulation is needed to ensure continued stability between a complex set of competing interests.²²

Cooperation and Friction - Current Policy and Strategy across South and East Asia

China's focus on securing access to resources is evident in its efforts to establish strategic relationships and build and expand port facilities from the Middle East to the Chinese coast.²³ China has concentrated on economic development and has, to date, lived mainly by the "24 character" strategy laid out by former Premier Deng Xiaoping: "Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership."²⁴ China's grand strategy, as it defines it, is one of: maintaining balance among competing priorities for sustaining momentum in national economic development; and, maintaining favorable trends in the security environment within which such economic development can occur. China's leaders describe the initial decades of the 21st Century as a "20-year period of opportunity," meaning that regional and international conditions will generally be peaceful and conducive to China's rise to regional preeminence and global influence.²⁵

Yuriko Koike, a former Japanese Minister of defense and national security, highlights that the importance of the commons is not lost on the Chinese, “The Chinese Navy is not only eyeing the Pacific, but also steering towards South Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and Africa. Indeed, the growing contrast between India and China is not only military in nature, but also concerns the acquisition of natural resources. By controlling the sea lanes, China hopes to gain leverage over India’s capacity for economic growth.”²⁶ To assuage similar concerns from across the region China’s leaders continue to claim that their approach has a peaceful intent: “ASEAN countries should be assured that China’s development of its navy is only to maintain the country’s own maritime interests and regional peace and stability.”²⁷

It is difficult, however, for China not to be seen as a major source of friction by other nations. More assertive claims for sovereignty over large areas of the South China Sea and strong reactions to the presence of Japanese Coast Guard vessels in the waters of the disputed Senkaku Island are supported by a naval strategy of ‘far-sea’ defense coupled with a growing capacity to project power out to the ‘Second Island Chain’ in the Western Pacific add to regional concern. China also failed to condemn the North Korean sinking of a South Korean corvette and their shelling of a South Korean island. Chinese action has succeeded in uniting many of the littoral states in the South China Sea against its high-handed refusal to discuss its territorial claims there. “Single minded” Chinese entrepreneurs and corporations are generating serious friction and anti-Chinese sentiment resonates across the region.²⁸ China’s assertiveness has been labeled “raw-knuckle diplomacy” and “the product of miscalculation” - the result of a

combination of Chinese mistrust for the American-led international order and significant internal debate about how China's new-found power should be exercised.²⁹

Although not directly reflected in its National Security Objectives, Indian policy highlights the "vital sea-lanes stretching from the Suez canal and Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca through which much of the oil from the Gulf region transits," and recognizes that this region will attract super power rivalries and the presence of "extra regional navies" will cause India difficulty as it attempts to secure its national interests in the Indian Ocean.³⁰ The policy defines both defense capability requirements and the additional operational reach needed to maintain a substantive presence in 'a security environment that extends from the Persian Gulf in the west to the Straits of Malacca in the east and from the Central Asian Republics in the north to near the equator in the south.'³¹

India has also shown a more determined approach to the encroachment of her old adversary, the Chinese, into affairs in South Asia. Manmohan Singh, India's prime minister, recently spoke of a "new assertiveness" in China, which he said was seeking a "foothold in South Asia," and as a result, India has been busy diplomatically promoting a "look east" policy of warmer ties with fellow democracies that fret, like India, about a more nationalistic China. India has backed their diplomatic efforts with trade deals with Japan and pushes for rapid implementation of an existing one with south-east Asian allies.³² It is clear that India fears that Chinese intentions are combative, power seeking and against peaceful co-existence.³³

The "look east" policy is supported by a robust approach to its maritime strategy, "Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy" which highlights that the

“key to ensuring long-term security and stable equilibrium in Asia lies in the collective ability of Asian countries to build mutual economic stakes in one another.”³⁴ The strategy stresses the geostrategic determinism of India’s influence in the Indian Ocean; “Portuguese Governor Alfonso Albuquerque had in the early 16th century opined that control of the key choke points extending from the Horn of Africa to the Cape of Good Hope and the Malacca Strait was essential to prevent an inimical power from making an entry into the Indian Ocean.”³⁵

Such rhetoric only encourages heightened tension between India and China. Chinese analysts postulate that India will inevitably develop the capacity to prevent and implement its own naval blockades against the choke points at Suez, Hormuz, and Malacca.³⁶ The MALABAR exercise of 2007 in which the Indian Navy along with naval forces from the US, Australia, Japan and Singapore, secured the western approaches to the Straits of Malacca, caused considerable consternation among the Chinese. The prospect that India might seek to blockade Malacca against China has caused Chinese analysts to describe the 244 islands that constitute the Andaman-Nicobar archipelago as a “metal chain” that could lock tight the western exit of the Malacca Strait.³⁷ Zhang Ming further argues that “once India commands the Indian Ocean, it will not be satisfied with its position and will continuously seek to extend its influence, and its eastward strategy will have a particular impact on China.”³⁸ He concludes that “India is perhaps China’s most realistic strategic adversary.”³⁹

Current US security objectives within the region seek to ‘deepen and update’ extant alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The US approach to managing alliances is dynamic to accommodate changes within the

region and the strategic trends of the 21st Century. The United States sees both Japan and South Korea as critical to any long-term solution. All current partners share a desire to develop a positive security agenda for the region, focused on regional security, combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, climate change, international piracy, epidemics, and cyber-security, while achieving balanced growth and human rights.

The United States has carefully played the role of regional ‘night watchman’ since the end of the Vietnam War and has met with some success as a result. It is also taking a stronger role in the region’s multilateral architecture, including ASEAN, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the East Asia Summit. Despite this many South East Asian nations feel that “the United States is too far, and China is too near.”⁴⁰ However, an unrelenting pursuit of U.S. interests as a priority and a desire to remain unrivalled in terms of influence and military power is viewed with caution within the region.⁴¹ U.S. actions in Iraq have reinforced beliefs that unilateral, pre-emptive intervention to a major threat against the U.S. or its interests will always remain a policy option that the U.S. would be all too willing to exercise despite diplomatic rhetoric to the contrary.

U.S., Chinese and Indian concern over each other’s intentions in East and South Asia has a concomitant effect on how each approaches the region. Despite viewing the issue through distinctly different lenses the security sensitivities of these three key actors coalesce with those of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Australia, and other ASEAN countries. Of critical importance to the region is the fact that while geo-strategic circumstances may be shared, national and security interests are not so

common. Within this microcosm of a radically interconnected global system nationalism flourishes.⁴² It's primarily for this reason that China is loathe to talk to or deal with 'ASEAN as a bloc' on contentious territorial and maritime issues like the Spratly Islands and the South China Sea, and the U.S. continues to pursue bilateral agreements on security issues.⁴³

The ASEAN countries are not about to hand over political autonomy to a rising power regardless of the extent of their influence. Singapore's Foreign Minister George Yeo captured the regional sentiment well in 2002: "We do not wish to be in a tributary relationship with China."⁴⁴ Greg Sheridan, former editor of the *Australian*, writes "No one in Asia wants to pool sovereignty....Asia's politicians have come up through the school of hard knocks and amid hard neighbors. They appreciate hard power."⁴⁵ The memory of occupation, the effects of colonization by great powers, and the success that can be had through the pursuit of independent and ambitious domestic political agendas remains fresh in the minds of the senior statesmen and elites across the region.

Despite contention over issues of sovereignty the region is, however, pragmatic in its approach to defense. Each nation acknowledges that despite several decades of growing democracy and political pluralism, old national rivalries, exacerbated by the new strategic uncertainty created by the growth of China and India, may lead to conflict. Wars were fought between the U.S. and Chinese-backed adversaries, and between China, India and Pakistan during the lifetime of the current leadership, and the problems that caused those wars remain largely unresolved.⁴⁶ Some analysts state that "full warfare is still plausible."⁴⁷

The Indonesians recognize the importance of their strategic location and the impact that the increased U.S., Chinese and Indian interest will have in the region. Their most recent defense white paper clearly recognizes the influence China has in the region.⁴⁸ Indonesia has also been actively engaged with India identifying mutual interests out to 2025 to “further expand and develop bilateral relations and cooperation in the fields of trade, industry, investment and other economic fields a strong partnership agreement with India on issues of trade.”⁴⁹

Singapore’s strategic concept of Total Defence, implemented in 1984, and reinforced in ‘Defending Singapore in the 21st Century’ of 2000, very clearly acknowledges the tensions that exist within the South China Sea, the importance of security to commerce and trade across and through the region, and the critical role that India has to play. It remains heavily focused on guaranteeing the integrity, sovereignty, and territory of Singapore.⁵⁰ This has been further reinforced in its more recent National Security Strategy of 2004 focusing on the deterrence and defeat of transnational threats to ensure that Singapore can promote itself as a business hub in the region.⁵¹

In its National Defence Policy (Dasar Pertahanan Malaysia) of November 2010, Malaysia outlined its strategic interests through three-tiers encompassing the areas of immediate vicinity, regional and global. The areas of its immediate vicinity comprise the land territories, territorial waters, airspace, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the Straits of Malacca and its approaches, and the Straits of Singapore as well as the sea and air lines of communication connecting Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak. Malaysia sees an increase in tension and a growing competition for territory

and access to vital resources in the South China Sea. Importantly, it speaks to a defensive posture based on deterrence and forward defense.⁵²

The Australian Defence White Paper of 2009 argues that, 'China by 2030 will be the strongest Asian military power ...its military modernisation will be increasingly characterised by the development of power projection capabilities.' It also notes that, 'The pace, scope and structure of China's military modernization have the potential to give its neighbours cause for concern....'⁵³ India's expanding economy and greater external engagement is recognized as giving it a stronger voice and stake in strategic affairs. The White Paper also recognizes the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean, "Over the period to 2030, the Indian Ocean will join the Pacific Ocean in terms of its centrality to our maritime strategy and defence planning."⁵⁴ Australia's sensitivity to its dependence on China as a trade partner, and the United States as a treaty partner under ANZUS leads to ambiguous, conservative and contradictory conclusions: although the rise of China will change Asia's strategic order fundamentally, the United States will remain in charge for the foreseeable future and Australia doesn't face any significant risk for many decades.⁵⁵

Australia, Singapore and Malaysia (with Great Britain and New Zealand) have already expressed common interests in protecting Malaysia and Singapore from external threat through the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) of 1971 and continue to confirm the importance of the FPDA in their respective defense policies.⁵⁶ Other South East Asian countries, including Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines and Thailand, are less concerted in their effort and can best be described as having 'interests in common,' namely the integrity of their sovereignty and territory, the

development of counter-terrorism capabilities, and the defeat of internal and transnational challenges to security. Geo-strategic circumstances alone divide the region into mainland South East Asia: Burma, Laos, and Vietnam, (which share borders with China), along with Thailand and Cambodia; and maritime South East Asia; Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines.⁵⁷ It is important to note, however, that all nations stress the importance of bilateral relationships. Some analysts describe the web of interests in South East Asia as multi-polar, a system dominated by several countries, while others prefer to describe it as polycentric, a system with several centers that achieve 'unity in diversity.'⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, non-alignment and the renunciation of the threat or use of force are both fundamental principles in the current ASEAN Security Community Plan of Action.⁵⁹ Regular meetings of the member nations' Defense ministers were not formalized until 2006 and development of a shared security compact remains a work in progress.

The Future Security Environment

There are essentially three ways in which the future security environment in South East Asia can be viewed with respect to harnessing the rise of both China and India.

The first is that China and India have genuinely peaceful intentions with no military ambition in the region. This is plausible due to the previous approach taken by the Chinese leadership of living within its national means, focusing on internal issues and issues of territorial integrity, while continuing to extend its influence through economic and cultural means. This message is similar to that being pushed by India. Unfortunately, even if both nations communicate this message in the most compelling of ways, the region could never be certain of the real intentions of either while they retain

the political, financial or military power to do otherwise. This is particularly the case with China as it dominates the region economically and its regional ambitions bite into ASEAN sovereign territories along with those of Taiwan, Japan and South Korea. History is replete with examples of poor judgment by rational actors in deciding whether nations are status quo or revisionist in outlook. The recent upheaval across North Africa and the Arab states of the Middle East has shown that it is impossible to identify who will be running the foreign policy of any country five or ten years from now, much less whether they will have aggressive intentions.

The second is that a benign China and India will continue on their current course as status quo powers and increase their respective power projection capability and expansive intent under the strategic defensive rubric. This is also plausible given the growing global footprint of each, the criticality of sea-trade to the future of both countries and a need for both to assume a share of the burden of underwriting security in the sea common and the region. The essential problem with this is the inherent difficulty in distinguishing between offensive and defensive capability. Rhetoric from both countries points to their respective naval strategies as being defensive in nature. However, as Robert Kaplan points out in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, “China’s naval leaders are displaying the aggressive philosophy of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century U.S. naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, who argued for sea control and the decisive battle.”⁶⁰ Indian Naval Officers, partisan-analysts and the popular Indian press also continue to quote Mahan (albeit inaccurately); “Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. This ocean is the key to the seven seas in the 21st century. The destiny of the world will be decided in these waters.”⁶¹ Significant increases in defense spending and an

aggressive program of naval development are clearly being interpreted with concern in the international arena.

This expansion of both capability and intent means that there is an increasing likelihood of the major maritime powers of the region, the United States, China and India, becoming locked in a classic security dilemma, whereby each side's supposedly defensive measures are taken as aggressive action by another, triggering similar countermeasures in an inexorable cycle. Any aggressive action in the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean or the archipelagic waters of South East Asia will prompt misinterpretation. Any overt action to contain China and limit its projection of military capability will be taken as a direct challenge to China's core interests. Similarly any challenge to India securing its sea lines of communications will not only draw an Indian response but will also draw other international parties into what has hitherto been an open ocean.

A third view that can inform how the rise of both China and India may be harnessed is that both China and India's current and relatively cooperative approach is not a true indication of how each will continue to behave into the future. As the current leading power in both the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the U.S. is likely to maintain that past behavior is not a reliable indicator of future behavior based on current projected growth of their competitors in the region. From a U.S. perspective it is entirely plausible that China and India will continue to project a status quo approach until they have developed the capacity to conduct offensive action as revisionist powers. India has already flagged its revisionist approach but is doing so by re-engaging with the west and reserving her distrust for old adversaries – Pakistan and China.⁶² China clearly believes

that past performance is the best predictor of future behavior likening the U.S. Navy to a man with a criminal record “wandering just outside the gate of a family home.”⁶³ It would be reasonable for China to believe that the United States is likely to use all means at its disposal to prevent the rise of a competitor in the Pacific and this includes offensive action. It would also be reasonable for China to form a cooperative arrangement with the U.S. in the Indian Ocean. This approach would require the rise of both India and China to be co-opted, limited, contained or balanced to ensure that U.S. interests are secured.

Each of the aforementioned approaches present significant challenges in framing feasible security options in South East Asia. There is a growing assertion that China cannot rise peacefully because it is likely to lead to an intense security competition between China and the United States, and between old adversaries, India and China. Moreover, it is felt that most ASEAN nations plus Japan, South Korea, Russia, and members of the FPDA, will join with the United States to contain China’s power while the opportunity exists to define and establish China’s role in the region.⁶⁴ Despite this perceived threat of regional conflict, the region still harbors suspicion for any mechanism seeking to prevent conflict that potentially transfers some element of sovereignty to supranational entities which do not share common historical or cultural ground. Increases in multilateral mechanisms have been matched by a proliferation of bilateral agreements as individual nations have sought to mitigate risk and protect national interests.

South East Asian nations recognize that the global system is becoming increasingly dominated by a complex web of bilateral and multilateral approaches and

are proving pragmatic in their navigation of this problem. The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) is an excellent example of three important and influential ASEAN countries; Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, operating collectively to establish maritime security in the Malacca Straits.⁶⁵ In addition to cooperation on specific security issues, most South East Asian nations now feel that their security is best maintained by engaging the great powers on a bilateral basis.⁶⁶ Nations such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines are proving adroit at drawing China into webs of inter-dependence while also hedging against Chinese influence by encouraging the United States to stay engaged in the region and prompting Japan and India to take more active security roles.

The complex suite of different interests in South East Asia means it is unlikely that a monolithic regional security mechanism is plausible but shaping the region towards a more robust collective approach may still be possible while U.S. primacy continues free of any serious challenge. In the past 15 years, Asia has moved from having almost no regional security institutions to a complex array of groups covering a wide spectrum of activities.⁶⁷ Regional collaborative efforts that compliment the U.S. alliance system have been strengthened and retooled since 2001, most particularly by Australia and Japan, and many states have significantly increased their defense budgets.

Potential Strategic Ends and Collective Security Responses

A range of scenarios and potential strategic ends exist. The first is that the United States retains primacy as the most important institutional pillar of the regional security order in South East Asia. There is little argument over the material differences between the national power of the U.S. and its closest competitors, however, the rise of China

will mean that the United States will continue to shift more focus to its relative position in Asia. Concerns over the rise of China will make India, the allies it shares with the U.S., and U.S. bilateral allies, and even former adversaries in the region more interested in deepening their strategic engagement with the United States.⁶⁸

In this status quo future, U.S. centered bilateral and regional relations will continue to be the main plank of U.S. security policy within SE Asia and the U.S. will therefore continue to seek to position itself as the key 'underwriter' for collective defense within the region. Due to the complexity of the region and also the criticality of the commons to stability, U.S. capability, whether unilateral or in coalition, must be sufficiently robust across all domains to exert both coercive force and also conduct decisive action. The U.S. must compliment its military strength by being much more politically engaged and through the development of more robust trade and financial links with South East Asia. India's influence is likely to remain limited to those nations that share the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal while its economic integration in ASEAN trade remains immature. In addition, the United States must apply its power by acting through local means wherever possible if it is to achieve the level of multilateral support needed for this approach to succeed. The cultural diversity of the region and the underlying desire for continued stability and prosperity provide the U.S. with many opportunities. Aligning U.S. and local interests to the achievement of regional stability, particularly in the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea will prove much more attractive to ASEAN nations than the expansion of any singular power and any commensurate increase in the potential for conflict.

The second scenario is that Asia's security order is no longer shaped predominantly by the choices and preferences of the United States. The security environment in South East Asia, in this scenario, is determined by the result of intense competition among the region's major powers, particularly the United States, China, and India. This represents a profoundly different outcome in terms of multilateralism in South East Asia. The larger and more powerful South East Asian countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam will play important roles as the balance of power routinely shifts in subtle and often unforeseen ways.⁶⁹

It is unlikely that nations will pursue any meaningful collective security mechanism across all countries in such a volatile environment unless the region is threatened directly and then it is likely that arrangements will be ad-hoc. In terms of relative power the United States would remain the most powerful actor in the region for the foreseeable future but it is likely that it will only be able to influence specific events or regions for constrained periods of time. Stable nuclear deterrence, strategic transparency, continued economic integration, confidence-building measures, and an awareness of the costs of conflict will be important elements in managing this more competitive, less stable future.⁷⁰

The best security architecture in this scenario may be to share power in a collective leadership arrangement with the strong states in the region. The rise of both Chinese and Indian naval capability means that the burden for underwriting security in the commons of South East Asia need no longer be the sole domain of the United States. Collective leadership by a group of great powers is an unusual but not unprecedented model of regional order.⁷¹ The Concert of Europe or the Age of

Metternich is an example of a balance of power established due to circumstances that are analogous to the 'interests in common', polycentric nature of South East Asia under this scenario. History also shows that such arrangements are inherently precarious. An Asian concert of powers may well only serve to widen differences and precipitate much more substantial conflict in the long-term. However, this approach may free the U.S. to cede responsibilities to like-minded others, such as India, Japan or the FPDA partners, and provide the catalyst for greater international pressure on the nations of the region, including China, to develop an effective Asian-centric alliance system.⁷²

The third scenario is Chinese primacy. A long-term aspiration for primacy, nurtured under China's present cautious foreign and strategic policies is understandable and allows them to quietly maximize capability without confrontation. However, other powers within the region such as Japan, Russia and India are unlikely to greet a Chinese bid for primacy with equanimity. China needs continued stability and prosperity over an extended period of time to mitigate internal demands, if this is possible, and to amass the strategic capability needed to seriously compete for primacy within the region.⁷³ It is difficult to see how Chinese primacy could be achieved without either a long era of multipolarity or through a sudden and rapid disintegration of the prevailing order, brought on by a shock, or shocks, to the region and its strategic order. This end could only become a reality if the U.S. failed to retain relative strength and collective support within the region. The U.S. would therefore have to accept a cooperative approach to security within region and also contend with intense competition between the major stakeholders as discussed in scenario two above.

A NATO-like arrangement, or SEATO reborn or ASEAN up-gunned may be considered a solution in this scenario. The conditions under which NATO was established and developed are not germane to South East Asia nor are they likely to develop within the region unless China's rise proves unassailable and materializes as an overwhelmingly negative force in the region. As Charles de Gaulle once said "Alliances are like girls and roses. They last while they last." The demise of SEATO in 1977 stands testament to this. As a more modern alternative ASEAN offers the only multilateral venue for official discussions of security issues in the region however its success lies in addressing very specific issues of regional significance and it is not conceivable that the level of unanimity required for collective security action would be achievable in all but the most benign of circumstances. Other regional ventures, such as the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) have failed to develop sufficient consensus to tackle difficult issues on the scale of regional security.

Conclusion

All of the approaches used to view the future security environment in South East Asia and the range of scenarios and potential strategic ends examined point to one key strategic issue - accommodating the rise of China and India without resorting to conflict or putting the security and stability of the region in jeopardy. As emerging powers, China and India have great aspirations and global interests but they need stability in the commons – the ability to move, act and integrate into both the region and the global economy. Both nations are currently building the military capability needed to enforce their use of the commons if needed. Ensuring that the Straits of Malacca, the sea approaches to the straits, and the littoral states remain stable and conducive to

unfettered trade and travel is of vital interest to both countries – much more than it is to the United States.

South East Asia has a long and violent history of rejecting the rise of any singular dominant power and continues to be diplomatically inscrutable on all but the most obvious of common interests. The hard and soft power needed to ensure stability and security in the region are immense and beyond the capacity of any one power even if a uni-polar approach proved acceptable. Some form of regional collective security mechanism is needed to both underpin long-term stability and act as a buffer to the interests of the United States, China and India. It is important that such a mechanism avoids any threat to sovereignty or cedes power to supranational entities and is based on shared common historical or cultural ground. A mutual alignment of international and local interests on the security of the commons and regional stability, particularly in the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea is the key to ensuring that no single power can rise to dominate South East Asia.

The United States will not, therefore, be able to influence the profound changes that are occurring in the region, address trans-national threats or prevent conflict in the commons by itself by continuing its current approach. Building the capacity for regional collective action and generating a substantive South East Asian voice on security and stability issues will be particularly difficult while the region remains assured that the U.S. will continue to fulfill the role of 'night watchman' and support treaty nations on issues of territorial integrity and the security of trade in the commons. The paradigm of the U.S. picking up the military shortfall across the region must change if conflict is to be avoided between the major powers.

The nations of South East Asia must take steps to ensure that conflict in this region is either deterred or contained and this will require a stronger collective approach and the achievement of an effective balance of powers. Continued reliance on powerful friends such as the U.S. contributes to the risk of confrontation of global consequence over issues that should be resolved at the regional level. The collective security architecture must therefore be inclusive, avoid marginalization and be representative of regional interests. The United States and its partners need to demonstrate that they empathize with and support the South East Asian perspective more than China does, as well as operate cooperatively to keep India satisfied as a continuing status quo power and encourage China to remain true to its current, prosperity focused, grand strategy.

Acting through the network of countries in the region to develop collective security cooperation from within South East Asia is not only desirable but matches the current realities of the region. The politics of the region alone prevents any singular power from shifting the collective outlook away from stability and prosperity unless there is a seismic shift in the nature of the threat to security across the region. Applying power and enforcing regional and international norms by acting through a local multilateral architecture will ensure collective security mechanisms are developed, nurtured and sustained. Local multilateral action will also prevent the dominance of any singular power over regional politics and reduce the potential for any future regional or international conflict.

Endnotes

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